

Jabez Gorham House
56 Benefit Street
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-146

HABS
RI,
4-PROV,
49-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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JABEZ GORHAM HOUSE

Address: 56 Benefit Street, Providence, Providence County,
Rhode Island

Plat 3, lot 226. This lot was 40 Benefit Street,
in 1844; 54 Benefit Street in 1847; 56 Benefit
Street in 1866.

Present Owner: Gorham Manufacturing Company.

Present Occupant: Unoccupied.

Present Use: To be a museum of early Gorham silver.

Brief Statement
of Significance: This is a typical wooden house of the 1790's
built for Jabez Gorham, the father of the founder
of Gorham Silver company.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners:

1790 Joseph Whipple, yeoman, sells to Sarah Hall, widow,
a certain lot of land bounded E on Benefit Street 40';
S by Star Lane 80'; W by Joseph Whipple 40'; N by Joseph
Whipple (or lately)... "Land opposite the NEW house of
Amos Allen"... Deed Book 21, page 705, in Providence City
Hall.

1791 Sarah Hall, widow, to John Lee "A certain lot of
land... it being the same I bought of Joseph Whipple in
1790"... Deed Book 23, page 33, in Providence City Hall.

1791 John Lee, cordwainer, sells to Joseph Burr, skinner
"A lot of land opposite Amos Allen's New House... it being
the same I bought of Sarah Hall"... Deed Book 23, page 154,
in Providence City Hall.

1792 Joseph Burr, sells for 25£ silver lawful money sells
to Jabez Gorham (father of the founder of Gorham's Silver)
and James Burr, saddlers, in equal moiety "one certain
house lot of land bounded: Beginning at the S/E corner
by the back of Benefit Street and Star Lane (so-called)
and opposite Amos Allen's House; thence N/ly and bounding
E/ly on Benefit Street 40'; thence W/ly bounding N/ly on
land of Joseph Whipple 80'; thence S/ly and bounding W/ly

on land of said Joseph Whipple 40', bounding S/ly on Star Lane 80', it being the same I bought of John Lee"...Deed Book 23, page 154, in Providence City Hall.

- 1798 Henry R. Chase, Owners and Occupants of the Lots, Houses and Shops in the Town of Providence, R. I. in 1798 Located on Maps of the Highways of that Date (Providence, 1914). Jabez Gorham: E on Benefit Street; S on Star Lane. W side of Benefit Street...Wood...41' x 32'..2 stories wood. Taxed for \$1000 (Taken from U S Census)
- 1802 James Burr, saddler, gives quit claim for \$750 to Jabez Gorham a certain lot of land "together with DWELLING HOUSE and all other buildings thereon standing"...Deed Book 27, page 362, in Providence City Hall.
- 1802 Jabez Gorham gives life tenancy to wife, Caty, then property is to be sold, Samuel Gorham, brother, the executor..Wills Book 9, page 62 in Providence City Hall.
- 1810 Samuel Gorham, executor of the estate of his brother Jabez Gorham, sells for \$1600 at public auction the above property to Joseph S. Cooke, the highest bidder...Deed Book 33, page 194, in Providence City Hall.
- 1810 Fire Records: To Joseph S. Cooke...House now occupied by widow Gorham, and formerly owned by Jabez Gorham. Wood.. 34' front and 28' front to rear..2 stories high in front and 3 in rear..Mss. fire insurance records of the Providence Mutual Insurance Co. at the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, R. I. Vol. 3, policy #1178.
- 1814 Joseph S. Cooke...1 dwelling House...wood, 2 st high in front and 3 in rear. 34' in length and 28' in depth standing on lot on the **corner** of Benefit and Star Streets...41-1/2' on Benefit and 81' deep. (formerly belonging to Major Jabez Gorham) In the rear of it is a lot 31' on Star Street and 78' deep with a 1 story building on the same..in the rear built by the late Joseph Whipple for a chaise house, now unoccupied. (Prov. Direct Tax 1814). Mss. tax descriptions in the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, for the 1814 Providence direct tax to the federal government.
- 1817 Joseph S. Cooke sells for \$2,700 the above property to William Russell mariner, and is the same estate conveyed to Samuel Gorham as executor of the estate of Jabez Gorham... Also a small lot of land with a chaise house..Deed Book 41, page 50, in Providence City Hall.
- 1823 William Russell, merchant, sells for \$2500 to Jabez Gorham a certain lot of land with a Dwelling House on the N/E corner of Star St. and is the same estate conveyed to grantor by Joseph S. Cook, in 1817. Deed Book 47, page 7, in Providence City Hall.

1894 Amey W. Wheeler, wife of Benjamin, and Harriet W. Greenwood (nee Webb) wife of Benjamin, sell to Margaret L. McLaughlin "a certain lot of land with all buildings and improvements thereon on the N/W corner of Star and Benefit Streets...being the premises that belonged to the grandfather of the grantors, the late Jabez Gorham, at the time of his decease...Deed Book 390, page 137, in Providence City Hall.

This property was taxed to the following persons in the years designated:

1894 Margaret L. McLaughlin
1920 Benjamin Hyman
1920 Sadie Comras
1934 Pater A. Comras
1935 Sadie Comras
1937 Sadie Comras Estate
1938 David Comras & wife Dora
1939 Proprietors, Swan Point Cemetery
1944 Harry L. Bates & Wf Katherine
1945 Katherine E Bates wid Harry
1946 Axel E. Johnson
1953 Lee Jay Corp.
1958 Burnside Corp.
1961 Gorham Manufacturing Co., to be a museum of early Gorham silver.

2. Date of erection: Built between 1792-1798.
3. Notes on alterations and additions: The house was restored after 1958 when the Burnside Corporation bought it.

Prepared by Antoinette F. Downing and Elvira Gowdey
for the Providence Preservation Society
August, 1961.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Typical wooden house of the period with restored exterior.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. Exterior restored; interior about to be restored.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Main front block and rear wing. Main block 34' (5 bays) x 28'; faces east. Two stories, attic, and elevated basement at rear.

2. Foundations: Random field stone or brick.
3. Wall construction: Heavy timber frame, exposed on interior plank walls, covered with clapboards. North side of wing is shingled; beaded corner boards.
4. Chimneys: One center brick chimney, recently rebuilt. One small brick chimney in wing.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Six panel front door, added since 1958; Ionic frontispiece with flat pilasters, pulvinated frieze, pediment with modillion cornice. Six panel door with top light in simple frame on south side. Six panel door in rear wing at cellar level.
 - b. Windows and shutters: 12 over 12 light double hung windows in projecting wood frames with high wood lintels with ornamental work scrolled keystones. No shutters. 6" x 8" panes of glass. Windows added since 1958.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable roofs, asphalt shingles.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed eaves; molded cornice returned slightly at the gable ends. Second floor window heads continuous with the cornice bed mold.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Center chimney, five-room plan.
2. Stairways: U-shaped, closed string stairway in front entrance hall, with molded hand rail, turned balusters, and turned newels.
3. Flooring: Wide board flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: four panel doors probably not original. Plain door frames with a simple, molded, mitred strip of trim.
6. Trim: Wood cornice apparently not original.
7. Hardware: Not original.
8. Lighting: Electric.
9. Heating: Later mantels with round-headed openings in first floor parlors.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Faces east on the sidewalk of a residential street.
2. Walks: Flagstone
3. Landscaping, gardens: Small rear yard, not tended as house is vacant.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
August, 1961.